

There is one exception—when a very young bird in a strange territory ignores the boundary rule, or when a young bird is being driven out of its parents' territory. The resident male's chase of the young bird then resembles a courting flight, being erratic, conducted through a territory and eliciting from the young bird a harsh, emotional and awkward whistle similar to that which was quoted above for an harassed female. The key to this puzzle lies in the season. Young birds are chased thus in autumn and early winter. Females are courted thus in spring and summer.

—(Mrs.) RICA ERICKSON, "Fairlea," Bolgart.

Passage of Fork-tailed Swifts.—During mildly thundery conditions on the afternoon and evening of January 22, 1950, numbers of Fork-tailed Swifts (*Micropus pacificus*) came under notice at Bickley. These were first seen at about 3.30 p.m. when upwards of 30 were overhead. The birds were hawking at an altitude of 300 or 400 feet, and it was soon noticeable that they were moving away to the south. While we could still trace the flight of some of them in the distance, however, a fresh batch appeared from the north, and as these gradually moved away in the wake of the others, another lot took their place. With scarcely a break others followed along, 20 to 30 at a time, hawking far and wide, but maintaining a steady southerly drift. This went on until 4 p.m. when the passage ceased. We estimated that at least 300 birds passed over during this period. Further small detachments appeared between 6 and 7.30 p.m.

At 6.50 a.m. the following morning (January 23) Mr. George Parton, who had first drawn my attention to the birds on January 22, observed parties of swifts moving along to the southward above Kalamunda, his attention being attracted by their sharp note, which he described as rather resembling the "cheep" of a young chicken.

At much the same time on the morning of January 24 his notice was again drawn to the presence of swifts overhead by the combined noise created by the notes of many individuals. On this occasion he estimated that there were at least 500 birds, and from time to time a centre would form about which the whole flock would gather closely. Although they were at a very great height the sound of their notes came clearly down to him.

The birds were still overhead when he rode off to work on his cycle at 7.25 a.m., but when he reached his destination a few minutes later they were no longer to be seen.

—W. H. LOARING, Bickley.

Breeding Behaviour in Tree Martins stimulated by Weather Change.—In the *W.A. Naturalist*, vol. 1, 1948, p. 154, E. H. Sedgwick refers to the breeding of this species (*Hylochelidon nigricans*) under the verandah and roof eaves of the Hotel Morawa. A party of fifty or more birds has continued to nest at the hotel since this date. Owing to their habit of also roosting under the eaves, and the continuous accumulations of droppings, periodic unsuccessful attempts have been made to dislodge them.

An examination of notes indicates that the birds are present throughout the year, but that the actual strength of the group frequenting the hotel building varies. What has always proved to be of remarkable interest is the certainty with which numbers of birds always return immediately a fall of rain occurs, thus indicating their presence in the area. Immediately approaching rain is apparent numbers may be seen swooping under the verandahs and twittering with great excitement. For some hours after the fall has occurred they are busy transporting leaves to the previous season's nesting sites. I have observed such abortive breeding behaviour during Mareh, April, May and June when rain has fallen in 1948, 1949 and 1950, but full-scale breeding has not commenced until August.

—S. R. WHITE, Morawa.

Fox as Predator on Sea Birds.—While walking along North Beach I came across an interesting trail in the sand. It had apparently been made by a fox dragging a heavy body along the sand. The trail ended some 30 yards from the sea near the top of a sandhill. Here was found the body of a Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax varius*) with most of the flesh eaten away.

Following the trail back to the sea showed that it was not a case of scavenging since the cormorant tracks led from the sea to behind a clump of bushes. Here the trail became confused and must have been where the fox struck. From this point the dragging trail commenced. It seems as though high tides had forced the bird to take refuge at a point where the fox was able to approach unobserved. Normally cormorants rest on sand spits where a good field of view is available.

Fox tracks were numerous throughout the sandhill area so doubtless such bush tragedies are more common than usually appreciated.

—V. N. SERVENTY, Subiaco.

Mimicry in the Black-throated Butcher-bird.—I heard one of the Blue-winged Kookaburras calling close to the camp the other day and went out to find it as it was away from the river gums. I particularly went out to discover if a Kookaburra had left the river as I have never yet come across one away from the big timber along the rivers. I found out that it was really a Black-throated Butcher-bird mocking the call. Since then I have seen this species of butcher-bird mocking the magpie and pee-vee calls. It is able to make the imitation perfectly.

—ALF SNELL, Lyndon, via Carnarvon.

[The Black-throated Butcher-bird (*Cracticus nigrogularis*) is recorded as a versatile bird-mimic. S. R. White (*The Emu*, vol. 48, 1949, p. 181) has mentioned its mimicking of the calls of the Yellow-throated Miner, the Ring-neck (Twenty-eight) Parrot and Brown Honeyeater. From the eastern States A. H. Chisholm ("The Problem of Vocal Mimicry," *The Ibis*, 1937, p. 711), quotes instances of the imitation of the calls and songs of the Koel and Channel-billed Cuckoos and Peaceful Dove.

—EDITOR.]